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UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

A SERMON

Preached in the First Baptist Church, Montreal,

BY

REV. JAMES GREEN.

AND

PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL REQUEST.

Montreal:

"WITNESS" PRINTING HOUSE.

1876.

UNITED CHURCH
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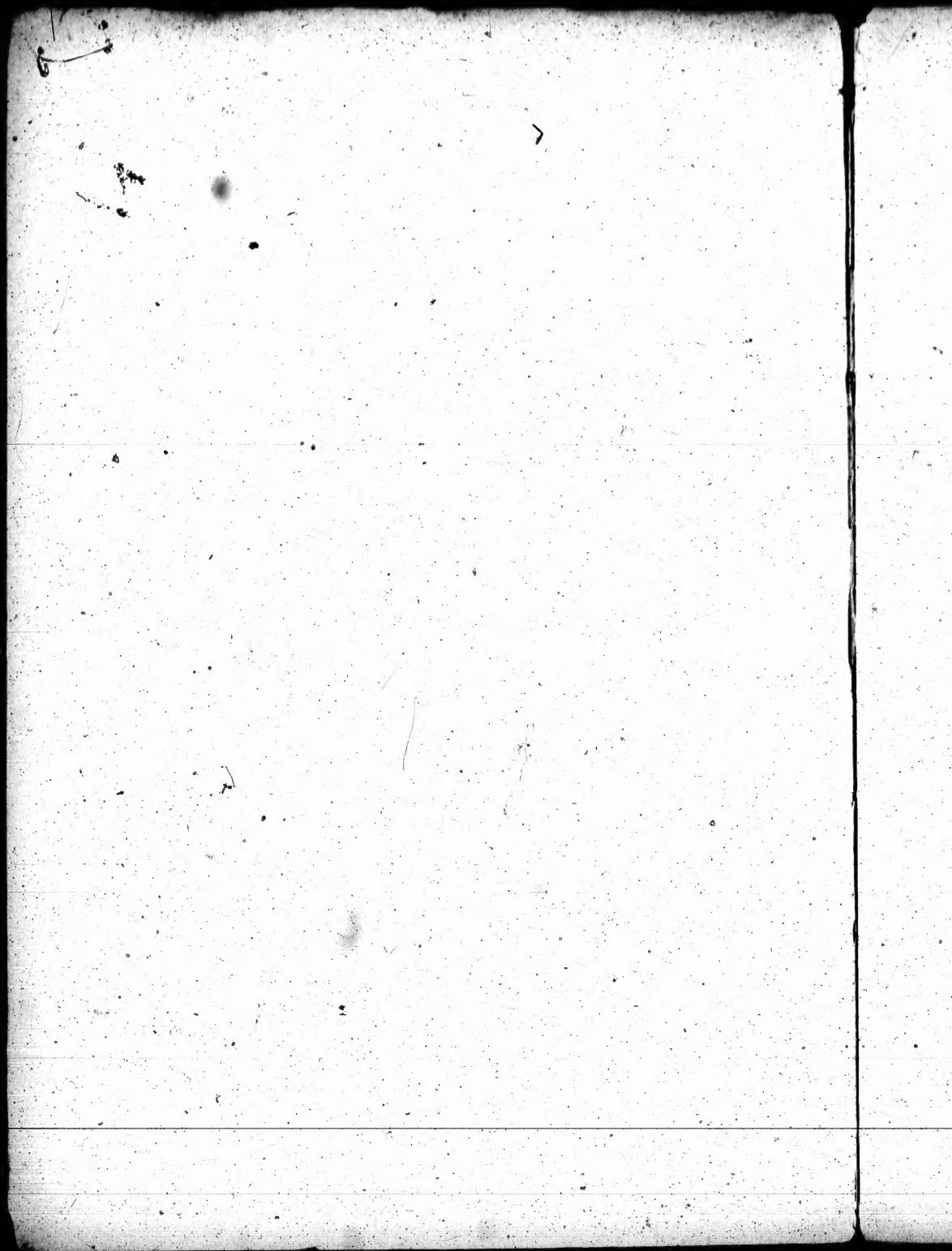
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UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

EZEK. xiii., 22.—“Because with lies ye have made the hearts of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life.”

Whatever may be said against the theory of universal salvation, we must admit it has great antiquity to plead in its favor, if aught favorable can be drawn thence. It is always safer, however; to judge anything by its nature than its age. It is sometimes attempted to defend the worst systems by their antiquity; and if this could ever be done, universalism is undoubtedly defensible, for it is very ancient. The first universalist preacher was Satan, and the first sermon upon the subject of which we have any account was preached in the Garden of Eden, when he said to our first parent: “Thou shalt not surely die.” That is a long time ago; but so far from the antiquity having established the doctrine, the nature of it has forever stamped the preacher as the “Father of Lies.” And so, in the words of the text: “These false prophets strengthen the hands of the wicked by promising him life, and thus prevent him from returning from his wicked ways,” God Almighty remonstrates with them, saying, “Because with lies ye have made the hearts of the righteous sad, I will deliver my people out of your hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.”

The defences of universalism are very plausible, but very various, and the views of the different champions of the system are sometimes not reconcilable one with another. Some maintain immediate salvation at death; some a partial state of suffering, but ultimate restoration of all men to happiness and bliss;

and some the final and complete annihilation of the wicked at the day of judgment. To give a complete view of all these, or even a perfect synopsis of them, in a short discourse, is a thing impossible. Neither is it needful, for we regard them one and all alike indefensible and unscriptural. We think the following statement will embrace every phase of this doctrine worth considering. They maintain :

1. "That Christ died for all without exception or limitation."
2. "That as a means in order that men may be made meet for salvation, God will sooner or later, through suffering or otherwise, bring all men under a willing subjection to His moral government."

The passages of Scripture quoted in support of these views, 1 Thess. v., 10; 1 Cor. xv., 3; Romans v., 6—with many others of this class—are regarded by the orthodox Christian Church, almost universally, as having reference to the faithful in Christ Jesus, and cannot be reconciled on any other supposition with those passages which speak of the condition of the finally impenitent; such as, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fires prepared for the Devil and his angels,—"
"And if thine hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life halt and maimed, than having two hands to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched."

Advocates of this doctrine, particularly those of the restoration class, have had much to say about the words "eternal," "everlasting," and "forever and ever." Their aim has been to show that these expressions are not to be taken in their common sense; that is, as we think, in their proper definition. In proof of this, we are cited to the fact that they are sometimes used to express limited or defined duration; but by the same method we might raise a cavil upon any subject, for there is scarcely a word in our language but what is used at times in a figurative sense. It was contended in a public discourse in this city but a short time ago that "the meaning of these words was not one of infinitude," which should be the case if the popular orthodox notion of never-ending punishment was to be received. But the word "infinitude" or "infinite," the root from which it springs, is sometimes

used in a limited sense, as in Nahum iii., 9: "Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite." The proper definition of "infinite" is *unbounded, unlimited*; but here it is used figuratively to show their strength was very large. So with the words *eternal, everlasting, forever and ever*. *Eternal* means without beginning and without end; *Everlasting* means that which had a beginning, but will have no end; and though like other words they are sometimes used figuratively, as when it is said "I will give thee the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession," the plain meaning is as long as the Jewish commonwealth should continue; or when the term "everlasting hills" is employed it is plainly an expression of their great antiquity, solidity, and long duration; but still these words have their proper meaning, and when used figuratively, the subject or their connection will always determine when they are used in an improper or limited sense. When we meet with such expressions as the "Eternal God," "Everlasting God," "eternal life," and "shame and everlasting contempt" they are doubtless to be taken in their utmost and most unlimited sense. So obvious is this, it is a matter of boundless surprise how any one should ever have had the rashness to make it a subject of controversy at all. But such has been the case, and perhaps from a variety of motives,—some from the solemnity and incomprehensible nature of the subject. The very thought of an eternity of suffering is overwhelming; and some, no doubt, have sought to diminish its magnitude and force by seeking to limit the meaning of the words that give expression to it. While we cannot but respect this feeling, we must at the same time question its loyalty to the teaching of Scripture, and ask, after all you have said and given every consideration to the arguments you advance, what stronger terms could have been used than those which have been used, to set forth the never-ending punishment and eternal sufferings of the finally impenitent?

But, laying aside all cavil about words, there are some things which appears unaccountably strange and irreconcilable in the teaching of Scripture, on the supposition that all are at last to be saved.

1. *On the supposition that all are to be saved, what are we to make of all those passages of Scripture which speak of the righteous and the wicked by way of contrast.*

"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

"Men of the world who have their portion in this life." "But I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness."

"The hope of the righteous shall be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish."

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death."

If these passages were intended to teach universal salvation, they seem strangely ambiguous, and the writers should have explained. The Universalist, I am sure, would explain. Some of them sound very much like the utterances of those ministers who preach a judgment to come, and unless they have two meanings,—a surface one and a hidden one—it seems difficult to understand why there should be such a difference made between the two characters. Why distinguish them at all, if both are going to the same place, and both going to be happy? The language of our Lord Jesus Christ, too, is very much of the same sort:—

"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

"He shall gather the wheat into his garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

"The world is a net full of good and bad; the good to be gathered into vessels, the bad to be cast away."

"All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

If it were designed that all at last should fare alike, it seems passing strange the Scriptures throughout should make such a contrast, and set the good and bad in such opposite states one to the other.

2. *On the supposition that all will be saved, how can we account*

for the great solicitude the Apostles ever evinced for the salvation of men?

That they were at all times very anxious and burdened with great concern for the salvation of their hearers and those among whom they labored, none can doubt who has paid any attention to their life and conduct. This was the burden of their whole conversation, their labor, their preaching and prayers.

Paul expressed his great anxiety for his brethren, the Jews: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart; for I could wish that myself were accursed for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh."

Not only had the Apostle Paul this concern for others, but he had such concern for himself as made him continually mindful of the pious rules of Christian warfare, for he tells the Corinthians: "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached the Gospel to others, I myself should be a castaway." He was also desirous that all to whom the Gospel was committed should show the same anxiety as himself, and conduct themselves in the same circumspect way to win sinners to Christ. To Timothy, he says: "Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrine, that in so doing thou may both save thyself and them that hear thee." Why all this care, this constant concern, this great anxiety, to save men if all were to be saved?

It is not common,—it is not natural—for men to feel so keenly for the coming of an event they know must come. We cannot for a moment suppose that all men were to be saved and the Apostle not know it. But, on the supposition that he knew that all would be saved, this great concern for their salvation was very unnatural and very unreasonable. Why did he go about "persuading every man," and "warning every man," to avoid a danger he knew did not exist?

The Apostle's conduct is very reasonable and very just, if he believed—as we think he did believe—that he that believeth not is condemned already, and that to every impenitent and unbelieving sinner, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil—of the Jew first, and also of

the Gentile." On any other supposition we cannot clear him from the charge of base hypocrisy, of which we cannot for a moment think him guilty.

3. *On the supposition that the Apostles preached Universal Salvation, is it not most unaccountable their hearers were so alarmed?*

Felix trembled before Paul preaching of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come. Why should he tremble? If Paul told him he would certainly be saved, that surely was nothing to tremble at. It might naturally have pleased him and given him a sense of security.

As in the words of the text, had Paul "promised him life," it might have "strengthened his hands in wickedness that he should not return from his wicked ways;" but that the promise of life should alarm him,—make him tremble—is passing strange. We cannot understand it.

So also the Philippian jailer, when under the pangs of a guilty conscience, was led to cry out in his extremity of fear "What must I do to be saved?" and at the day of Pentecost they were excited with like alarm and gave utterance to the same anxious inquiry. If the Apostles had been preaching that all would be saved we can see no reason for this. But when the Apostle told them to "know assuredly that God had made that same Jesus whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ," they trembled at their wicked deed, knowing that he would come again to "judge both the quick and dead," and that they would be called to account for their wickedness. It was this that alarmed them, and not the assurance that all would be saved.

4. *On the supposition that the Apostles preached Universal Salvation, is it not singular they met with such opposition?*

Stephen was stoned to death. A terrible persecution arose at Jerusalem. Men and women were haled to prison. Herod stretched forth his hand and vexed the Church. Paul was beaten with many stripes, and oft cast into prison—persecution met both preachers and brethren at every turn. That future and eternal punishment is repugnant to the unsanctified mind every one knows, and when the Apostles warned their hearers, saying :

"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out," they were enraged at being charged with guilt, and the thought of being brought into judgment for their wicked doings they could not endure. This is natural. But that men should be maddened and enraged by being told that all would be said passes comprehension.

5. *If Christ himself intended to teach Universal Salvation, there is something in his language both strange and inappropriate.*

As when he says, "Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell." Here, in this passage, we have a whole host of errors swept away with one breath. How distinct and separate he makes the soul and body! One may exist without the other. Man may kill one, the body, but not the other, the soul; that is immaterial and beyond the reach of material agency. God alone can deal with it. It plainly proves also that the soul may perish in the Scriptural sense, but though it perish it does not cease to exist. We may be told that though God be able to cast into hell, he will not do it. He is too merciful, too loving-kind; but if so, why should we fear Him?

Again, Christ says, "Enter ye in at the straight gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat. Because, straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Here life and death are plainly set before us. They are two separate states, and each one has its own separate road. One leadeth to destruction, and it is broad. It has paths suited to various sinful dispositions and inclinations. The covetous devotee of this world, as well as the children of levity and dissipation. The Pharisee, the empty moralist and proud, boastful philosopher, with the infamous debauchee, may all find room to walk this road, hating one another, but pleasing or forgetting themselves; but yet the end is the same—it leadeth to destruction. The road to life is very narrow, and the gate of entrance more difficult still. It can only be entered by repentance and faith. It can only be travelled by denying ourselves, taking up

the cross and following Christ. We must be born again or we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. The way is narrow, for it is one of implicit faith and obedience. "Yet every one that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh the gate shall be open." A Christian cannot choose his path as the men of the world do. If the road be difficult he must climb; if rough, he must keep on still; if he meets with enemies, these he must overcome, but persevere in the one narrow way.

But, if all are to be saved, why did Christ make such distinction? According to the Universalist, there is no way to destruction, and the way to Heaven is so wide all will find it. What a contradiction! If Christ intended to teach Universal Salvation, He should have explained. The Universalist always explains when he comes to passages like this. We do not, however, believe that any explanation, short of taking away the plain, obvious meaning will answer their purpose here. Here are two ways, leading to two separate destinations, and if we would land in Heaven, we must walk the way of life. We must serve God, and not only be singular to walk with the few, but we must also persevere in the narrow way, and let us be thankful "that every one that seeketh, findeth; and to every one that knocketh, the gate shall be opened;" so that those who refuse are left without excuse.

Men have sought in various ways to soften down asperities, as though they were more merciful, more loving-kind, than God our gracious and long-suffering Heavenly Father, who knows all things, and knows what is best for the whole family of his creatures; and yet he has told us plainly "that the Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and shall gather out of his Kingdom all that do offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them out into a furnace of fire," and this is the explanation of a parable—to make clear what was obscure. On the supposition that he intended to teach that all would be saved, no words can express our astonishment at such language. Why make a distinction at all, except on sure and certain ground that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things

done in the body according to that we have done, whether it be good or bad?"

6. *If there is no judgment after death, there is something strange and unequal in God's treatment of his creatures here.*

Few there are who will deny that this life is a state of probation, but while admitting this, there are some who maintain that sin and wrong-doing bring their own punishment even here. These two notions are not consistent. If we are in a state of probation, it is proper that good and evil should be set before us, that we may choose the one and reject the other, preparatory to an ultimate and final reckoning; but if, on the other hand, sin brings its own punishment in this life, a judgment hereafter would not be just.

Virtue is in part rewarded, and sin often in part punished here, there is no doubt. We may be taught prudence, caution and diligence in managing our affairs, by the perils, losses, inconvenience and suffering which result from thoughtlessness, inattention and improvidence, from idleness and extravagance. Such losses and suffering, however, can not surely be regarded as full, just and adequate punishment, for they often affect others, such as families and dependents, as much, or more, than the evil-doer himself. And how are their wrongs to be righted? To suppose that all things are to be left as we see them here, is seriously to impugn the justice, the wisdom and omniscience of the all-wise Moral Governor of the Universe.

In like manner, cruelty and oppression bring their own punishment, in a measure, in the inward disquietude and remorse with which the tyrant sooner or later is often seized; but how seldom are the objects of his tyranny benefitted thereby, or the wrong done them righted in this life. The partial retribution which is made inseparable from sin is enough to prove the moral government of God upon earth; but its very partial application demonstrates most clearly the necessity of a fuller development of justice, judgment and equity; such as we are assured will take place when God shall judge the secrets of all men, according to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If there is no judgment hereafter, wicked men often fare better than the righteous.

The judgment that befell the Egyptians when they were drowned in the sea was no judgment at all, according to this hypothesis, but a merciful interposition of Providence to stop their mad career and take them straight to Heaven, while His own people, the Israelites, were left to hunger and toil, labour and sorrow, forty years in the wilderness. God rained fire and brimstone upon the wicked Sodomites, and destroyed them, and we have been accustomed to look upon this act as a fearful judgment for their egregious wickedness, but if it is true that there is no judgment hereafter, this is all a mistake; for after their short momentary suffering, they would have done with all pain and sorrow, and happiness and Heaven would immediately begin. On this supposition, their state was far better than that of righteous Lot, who was deprived of his partner in life and left to struggle on in this sin-stricken world, with all its cares and woes, its temptations and sorrows, through the natural period of his life. But this is too serious a subject to pursue in this strain, apart from the absurdities to which it would lead us. For if there is no judgment hereafter, and all are to be saved, a man may eat and drink and be merry; he may steal, lie and defraud; he may commit every sin and crime of the decalogue, and still have it in his own power to terminate his trouble and suffering here by the deed of his own hand, for if all are to be saved, the suicide will be among the number.

This fearful and revolting view of the case has led some to admit the necessity of a general judgment hereafter, and a state of suffering for a time, but only for a time, till the restoration or restitution of all things.

Aside from the entire silence of Scripture in reference to any re-adjustment of the state of the wicked after the last general judgment, this makes suffering an atonement for sin, and the death of Christ a needless sacrifice; for if individual suffering could avail in one case it could in all. If, after a state of suffering for a time, the finally impenitent are to be released therefrom and enter Heaven, rest and happiness will be theirs as a

matter of right, and they will never ascribe their happiness to "Him who loved us and washed us from our sins." Moreover, it claims for suffering a corrective effect, which it seldom, if ever, possesses. If all the course of God's dealings with them, while upon earth, dealings of chastisement mingled with mercy, and the sweet influences of Gospel grace have failed to win their hearts, what expectation can we have that the severe sufferings of another world will do so? If they maintained their enmity and hostility here under the long suffering and mercy of God, while He called and entreated them to return unto Him, called them to repent and be saved, and yet they resisted, will they be softened with judgment and suffering without mercy? Will they not rather increase in hatred and rebellion, and become more and more unfit for the society of God, of holy angels, and the redeemed in Heaven? The fiat has gone forth and it cannot be changed. "He that is holy let him be holy still, and he that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy let him be filthy still." "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Be warned in time, for as the tree falls so it must lie.

In a venerable "Assembly" in this Province, just recently, there was much discussion upon this subject, and the question was several times asked "Of what importance is it?" As though it was a mere matter of harmless speculativeness which any one might indulge in very innocently. Would it not serve a better purpose to inquire "Of what use is it?" for we can see no good use whatever in indulging a speculative turn of mind on such things above what is written. Even if the wicked are to be restored after a certain time of suffering, it can do the faithful in Christ Jesus no good to know it. They are safe without it, and one would think it can do the wicked no good either, for if they cared about it, or were at all anxious, there is a way, a plain way, to be saved, one about which there is no doubt whatever, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." It may, however, and very possibly will, do the wicked much harm, to "promise him life," "by strengthening his hand in wickedness" "and making him feel secure in his wicked ways." This is a fearful responsibility. Let man beware; let the press beware!

Let all beware, and more especially the preacher of the Gospel, to give no such encouragement, lest he involve himself in such fearful guilt, and *the blood of those that perish be required at his hands.*

IN CONCLUSION,

The enquiry is made : "*As we are required to love our enemies, may we not safely infer that God loves His enemies ?*" Undoubtedly God loves all his creatures, and that so ardently, he desireth not the death of a sinner. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his wicked way and live." But this question carries with it the insinuation that, if God loves his enemies, he cannot punish them—at all events not more than a little, and that little must be for the enemies' good. This is a false assumption. God is the governor of the entire universe, and looks to the greatest good of all the parts. The offender is but a unit, and why should all sympathy centre in him, and the myriads of other subjects receive no consideration ? This is like that sympathy for the murderer that prevails in common life, till it has paralyzed the arm of the law, and made hanging unpopular ; but what is the effect ?—the lawless are rampant, and the whole community is endangered. Sympathy is noble, but, misplaced, it is both dangerous and destructive. With our finite minds we cannot comprehend the whole bearing of God's law and government, but we know that it is "*holy, just and good*," and yet there is suffering here that we cannot account for—suffering before our eyes daily, as mysterious as any that has been mentioned in connection with the world to come. Why all this infant mortality, with all its previous train of suffering, pain and agony ? These, of themselves, have transgressed no law, and yet they are under the government of God, whose law is "*holy, just and good*." With more show of reason, we might ask the question : "*If God loves His enemies,*" how much more these little ones ? And yet they suffer. "God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son to die" for our sins—the strongest proof of His love that could be given, but at the same time, proof of justice as well as mercy, and one that leaves the impenitent sinner without excuse,

whatever may be his suffering. The day will come that shall furnish ample proof that suffering and punishment, whether here or hereafter, are not only consistent with Divine love, but the fruits of it, though at present it far surpasses our finite comprehension. God doth love his enemies, loved the whole world lying in wickedness, loved us all, even while we were yet enemies, so that Christ died for us, yet those that remain obstinate transgressors shall not escape his chastisement; even the "righteous shall not be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth, but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die." "God is love," and the supreme object of creation is his own glory, not the sheltering of the obstinate and impenitent sinner.

It may be asked "Are there few that be saved?" The way to death is thronged with the multitude that do evil. Here they walk without trouble, for the road is wide, and every one may follow his own inclination. Here are the devotees of fashion. The noble and the wise of this world. Here also are the covetous, the voluptuous and the drunkard, the profligate and profane swearer, and a vast multitude more in all the various ranks and walks of sin. Frenzied with present gratification, and careless and forgetful of the future, a multitude so great no one can reflectively look upon it without sadness and sorrow." But yet, on the other hand, we know that there will be a multitude around the throne of God that no man can number, all singing that new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book and open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and nation."

There will be all who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. These have entered through the straight gates of regeneration. Have repented of their sins and their robes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

There will be all who have died in infancy, whether they have been baptized or not. That makes no kind of difference, for these are all sharers in the efficacy of Christ's sufferings, for it is written, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, and though sin has tainted all Adam's posterity, old and

young, yet sin is no more imputed when there is no transgression; the taint of sin is in the very nature of all, the infant as well as the adult, and these cannot be saved, as some suppose, because of their innocence; yet as there is no imputation of sin when there is no actual transgression, all that die in infancy will be found with the, *ransomed of the Lord*.

If any would enquire further, "Are there few that be saved?" we can only give them the answer of the Lord: "Strive to enter in at the straight gate." "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Refusing this, you reject the council of God against yourselves, and, if lost at last, you can bring no railing accusation against God when all his creatures of the whole universe shall confess Him Holy, just and good, supreme in power, wisdom, and loving kindness.



